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FIRST GRADE CHILDREN WORK WITH VARIANT WORD ENDINGS.

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AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE IF INSTRUCTION IN VARIANT WORD ENDINGS CAN BE GIVEN IN THE SECOND SEMESTER OF THE FIRST GRADE IS DESCRIBED. TWENTY-SIX FIRST-GRADE CLASSES (554 CHILDREN) FROM THE ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM WERE USED IN THE STUDY. THE CLASSES WERE DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS OF 13 CLASSES EQUATED ON SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL, READING ABILITY, MENTAL ABILITY, AGE, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE USE OF VARIANT WORD ENDINGS. IN ADDITION TO REGULAR BASAL READING INSTRUCTION, THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP WAS GIVEN EIGHTEEN 20-MINUTE LESSONS IN GENERALIZATIONS CONCERNING THE VARIANT ENDINGS "S," "ED," "D," "ING," "ER," "EST," AND "ER." THE CONTROL CLASSES USED THE SAME PERIODS OF TIME FOR INDEPENDENT READING. READING SKILLS WERE EVALUATED BY THE BOND-BALOW-HOYT NEW DEVELOPMENTAL READING TEST AND A SPECIALLY CONSTRUCTED VARIANT ENDING TEST. FOR ANALYSIS OF SCORES, EACH GROUP WAS DIVIDED INTO THREE MENTAL ABILITY GROUPS, FIVE READING GROUPS, AND THREE SOCIOECONOMIC LEVELS. THE F RATIO FOR ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE WAS APPLIED TO THE MEANS OF THESE GROUPS. SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES FAVORING THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S KNOWLEDGE OF VARIANT ENDINGS ARE REPORTED. SUBGROUP SCORES ARE COMPARED AND EVALUATED. THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS ARE DISCUSSED. REFERENCES ARE GIVEN. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE READING TEACHER," VOLUME 19, APRIL 1966. (LS)

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The Reading Teacher, 19 (April 1966), 50

First Grade Children Work with Variant Word Endings

by IRENE W. HANSON

ONE OF THE continuing concerns of primary grade teachers and authors of beginning reading materials is when and how instruction should be given in the use of variant word endings. That this concern is an important one is shown by a study by Edward Dolch (2), in which he reported that the three most common syllables in 8,409 samples of 14,000 running words in elementary school textbooks in arithmetic, history, and geography were *ing*, *ed*, and *er*. *Ing* occurred 240 times with 135 different words. *Ed* occurred 165 times with 90 different words. *Er* occurred 223 times with 72 different words. *Est* occurred 53 times with 17 different words. Since 14,000 running words represent about fifty pages of textbook material, this investigation pointed up the great frequency of occurrence of variant word endings and also their breadth of applicability to words in the English language.

Worth J. Osborn (3) investigated the frequency of occurrence of initial, medial, and final syllables in words in the Rinsland word list. He reported that the syllable *ing* occurred 881 times, *ed* occurred 338 times, *er* occurred 323 times, and *est* occurred 65 times. Osburn also made the following interesting comment:

> We are told that the amount of transfer that takes place in learning is due, in a large measure, to the learner's ability to perceive identical elements in separate activities. Since this is true, one very useful approach to the teaching of the slow learner is to make him conscious of identical elements. . . .
>
> The syllable that recurs most frequently is final "-ing," which is found in 881 of the 9,000 words. With perfect transfer, a child who has learned the "-ing" syllable in, say "going," will know that syllable in 880 more words.

These studies establish without doubt the frequency of occurrence and the importance of teaching the use of variant word endings. The following investigation conducted by the author attempted to answer the question of when such instruction could most profitably be given.

Twenty-six first grade classes from the St. Paul, Minnesota, public school system were used in the study. Thirteen of the classes were in the experimental group and thirteen in the control group. The classes in the groups were equated for socioeconomic level. Pretest data revealed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups with regard to reading ability, mental ability, chronological age, or knowledge of the use of variant word endings. The total number of children included in the analysis of the study was 554.

Over a period of four weeks the experimental classes received eighteen periods of special instruction in generalizations concerning variant

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word endings and the application of them in contextual material. The endings taught were: *s* added to nouns and verbs, *ed, d,* and *ing* added to verbs with no change in the root word and also with dropping or doubling of a final consonant in the root word, *er* and *est* to form the comparative and superlative forms, and er as a noun agent. Each day's lesson required about twenty minutes and was given in addition to all regular reading and phonics instruction. The lessons were conducted with each class as a whole and consisted of a preliminary presentation of a variant ending generalization by the teacher, largely through the inductive method, and a period of pupil practice, both oral and written, including the use of a worksheet. Teachers' manuals and daily worksheets were supplied to the experimental classes. Vocabulary for instruction was chosen from the set of readers already in use in the classes, and the format of the worksheets was similar to that found in primary reading workbooks. Thus attention could be concentrated on the variant endings rather than on new vocabulary or new methods. The control classes used the same periods of time for independent reading.

The study was conducted during March and April of the first grade school year. The Bond-Balow-Hoyt New Developmental Reading Test (*1*) and a specially constructed Variant Ending Test were administered to all classes during the pretest and posttest periods. IQs and ages were obtained from school records.

Personal data and the differences among class means of the experimental and control groups on the tests were compared by means of the *F* ratio for analysis of variance. Then all the children in the experimental and control groups were divided into three mental ability groups, five reading ability groups, and three socioeconomic level groups. The means of these groups were then also analyzed by using the *F* ratio for analysis of variance.

Findings

1. There was a significant difference between pretest and posttest means of class means on the Variant Ending Test in favor of the experimental group over the control group. The difference was significant at the .01 level for the total number of children and for the boys, but was in the region of doubt (between the .01 and the .05 level) for the girls.

2. There was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in reading scores before or after instruction in using variant word endings when the Bond-Balow-Hoyt New Developmental Reading Test was used as the measuring instrument. No response items on this test required a utilization of knowledge of variant word endings; hence, it can only be said that general reading ability as measured by this test was neither improved nor harmed by the special attention to the endings of words.

3. There were no significant differences among the gains on the Variant Ending Test of children in

high, average, or low mental ability groups. The three groups profited about equally from the instruction.

4. There was a significant difference among the gains on the Variant Ending Test of children in the five reading ability groups. The three lowest reading groups, which had measured average reading grade equivalents of 1.5, 1.8, and 2.0 on the pretest, profited somewhat more than the two highest reading groups, which had average reading grade equivalents of 2.4 and 2.9 on the pretest. The significantly higher scores of the two highest reading groups on the Variant Ending pretest showed, however, that these groups had already acquired much knowledge of variant word endings.

5. The differences among mean scores of children assigned to the three socioeconomic levels were in the region of doubt (significance between the .01 and the .05 levels) on the Variant Endings pretest. There were no significant differences among their means of posttest scores or mean gains. These data seem to suggest that socioeconomic status may have had some effect on pretest scores but that this effect was lessened by the instruction in variant word endings.

Educational Implications

1. The findings of this study clearly indicate that the teaching of generalizations concerning the use of variant word endings is possible and effective in the second half of first grade and that many of the children by that time have already acquired a considerable knowledge of such word endings independently.

2. Since the mean scores on the Variant Ending Test were significantly different for each reading ability group and increased regularly from the low group to the high one, the investigator suggests a planned sequence of teaching variant word endings, starting with noun plurals at the preprimer reading level, verbs adding *s, ed,* or *ing* with no change in the root word at primer level, verbs with changes in the root word and noun agents at first reader level, and comparative and superlative adjectives at the second reader level. This sequence differs from most presently used ones in beginning earlier with verb endings and completing instruction at the second reader level rather than at the third reader level.

3. The findings of this study indicate that the present practice of severely restricting the use of variant word endings in first grade reading materials is unnecessary since most first grade children are already familiar with their use in speech and are learning to use them independently in reading, even though they have not been specifically taught to do so. Authors of first grade reading textbooks should be able to make use of the *s, ed,* and *ing* verb endings throughout primer and first reader levels, provided a planned sequence of instruction in the generalizations concerning the use of variant word endings is maintained in the teachers' manuals and pupil workbooks.

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will bē ābl too adopt "new spelling" with nō mōr confūzhon than yoo havv on this pāj.

The key to English the New Way is the introduction in Step I of 42 basic English sounds in seven lessons, and in Step II of 52 other regular ways of spelling in twelve lessons. These are covered in Book I.

The last two steps are in Book II of *Learn English The New Way*. Step III bridges over to the old spelling. Thirty-five steps help to solve spelling problems. Step IV teaches the 250 "demon words" which break "all" rules. The Appendix to Book II contains the fifteen hundred most used words in English with both the old and new spelling.

English the New Way is an important step in the development of simplified spelling systems. Spelling simplification is a factor to be considered in the future development of English reading materials. The answer to the question is yes, another simplified spelling system is available.

(Richard W. Cortright is Director of Education, Laubach Literacy Fund, Inc.)

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Work with Variant Word Endings

(Continued from Page 507)

Hopefully, this increased use of common verb endings in first grade reading materials should permit authors to produce beginning reading materials which can conform more easily and naturally to English speech.

(Mrs. Hanson is Assistant Professor of Education at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. This material was taken from her dissertation for the Ph.D. degree, which she received from the University of Minnesota in June 1965.)

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